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Participatory Needs and Opportunities Assessment as Springboard for Integrated Research and Extension Interventions

MAGDALENA WANAWAN¹, VIRGINIA TAPAT²

¹*Department of Agriculture- Regional Field Office, Cordillera Administrative Region, Research Division, Philippines*

²*Regional Field Office, Cordillera Administrative Region (DA-RFO, CAR), Field Operations Division, Philippines*

Abstract

The Participatory Needs and Opportunities Assessment (PNOA) is based on the recognition that the involvement of target beneficiaries as project partners even in the planning stage is a key factor in coming up with relevant interventions. As part of the strategies of the Heirloom Rice Project, the Department of Agriculture commissioned four State Colleges and Universities (SCU's) to lead the PNOA in four targeted provinces. The SCU's were assisted by multi- disciplinary researchers and extension experts from the International Rice Research Institute, PhilRice, Department of Agriculture and Local Government Units. The project sites were indigenous communities that organically produce heirloom rice in terraced paddies. The PNOA was implemented through focus group discussions in 12 selected villages using the transect map, seasonal calendar, hopes and fears and venn diagram as data gathering tools. Outputs were presented in a plenary session for collective validation.

In each village site, results of the PNOA include information on the communities' natural resources and land use, commodities grown, existing infrastructure, health facilities, educational facilities, and service institutions. Another output is a listing of agricultural activities aligned along monthly climatic conditions and occurrences of pests and diseases plotted vis-a-vis the agricultural cycle. Common rice pests identified in all village sites were golden apple snail, rats, stem borer and rice birds. Ninety two percent declared earthworms as pest because they burrow on terrace walls causing water seepage. Major problems include soil erosion causing abandonment of some rice fields, inadequate irrigation during summer, expensive labour, low yields, production pests, lack of customized farm equipment appropriate for rice terraces and scarce post-harvest amenities. Low product price was encountered by farmers who sell part of their produce. Respondents also disclosed farming practices and decided collectively on perceived needs and opportunities.

Based on the PNOA results, the project team updated their integrated research and extension initiatives and provided production, postharvest, capability building and market-related support to the project sites from 2015–2017. From this experience, PNOA is recommended as basis in coming up with holistic research, extension and other essential interventions.

Keywords: Participatory assessment, rice pests identification